

Harrison S Hughes

Harrison Sterling Hughes was born on March 9th, 1914 in Benton County, Washington. His mother, Irene Hughes, was originally from Nebraska and his father, Harry Sterling Hughes, was originally from Iowa. Hughes was the second oldest in his family of two sisters and three brothers.¹ He grew up in Hover, Washington, a small town that is now a ghost town as most of the buildings either burned down or were flooded due to a new dam that was put in on the Columbia River.² Either one or both of Hughes parents were Washington State College alumni which made Harrison a WSC legacy.³



¹ 1940 U.S. Census, Benton County, Washington, population schedule

² Benton County Park Board, "Hover Park Interim Master Plan," Benton County Parks (2008, 6.

³ "New Cougars Listed as 240," *Washington State Evergreen* (Pullman, WA), November 5, 1934.

Hughes in his Army uniform

Hughes attended Washington State College from 1934-1940 and did not graduate. He majored in mechanical engineering. Hughes was a member of the Associated Engineers in 1938 which was the general club for all engineers at the time for WSC.⁴ In 1940, Hughes was a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers which was a new club more directed towards his specific type engineering.⁵



American Society of Mechanical Engineers Group Photo⁶

Outside of school, he was one of 2,391 enlisted men of the Washington National Guard from the years 1935-1939.⁷ At this time, the National Guard had just been merged with traditional state militias due to the National Guard Mobilization Act⁸. The main thing that the National Guard was responsible at this time was tending to any situation where “people are put in imminent danger.”⁹ The biggest situation the National Guard had to deal with while Hughes was in service

⁴ Washington State College, Chinook 1938 Yearbook (1938), 318.

⁵ Washington State College, Chinook 1940 Yearbook (1940), 304.

⁶ Washington State College, Chinook 1940 Yearbook, 304.

⁷ *Spokesman Review*, July 15, 1945.

⁸ Office of the Adjutant General of Washington State, *The Official History of The Washington National Guard* (Tacoma), 77

⁹ Office of the Adjutant General of Washington State, *The Official History of The Washington National Guard* (Tacoma), 78

was in the city of Tacoma in June 1935 where extreme violence towards workers of the Mill and Lumber industry that had returned after a strike which was eventually subdued.¹⁰ One reason for Hughes' prolonged enrollment at WSC could be due to his participation in the National Guard, making him a part time student.

Hughes eventually left school and enlisted in the Air Corps of the Army branch in Fort Lewis, Washington on July 29th, 1940.¹¹ He became a second lieutenant of the 24th Pursuit Group of the 20th Pursuit Squadron which was based at Clark Field in Luzon, Philippines and activated October 1, 1941.¹² Hughes was an active pursuit pilot in the 24th before America had declared war on Japan.

¹⁰ Office of the Adjutant General of Washington State, *The Official History of The Washington National Guard (Tacoma)*, 78

¹¹ Adjutant General's Office, "Records of World War II Prisoners of War," *The National Archives*, last modified 1947, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/record-detail.jsp?dt=466&mtch=1&cat=all&tf=F&q=Harrison+S.+Hughes&bc=sd&rpp=10&pg=1&rid=36277>.

¹² Maurer Maurer, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Office, 1961), 75.



“Pilots of the 20th Pursuit Squadron at Nichols Field, mid-May, 1941.”¹³ Harrison Hughes is the sixth one down from the left in the first row.

The island was equipped mostly with Seversky P-35 and Curtiss P-40 Warhawk fighters which is what Hughes and his squadron had been practicing on.¹⁴ After the Pearl Harbor attacks, Luzon was attacked several hours later and damaged heavily.



¹³ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start: American Pursuit Pilots in the Philippines, 1941-1942*, (Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 14.

¹⁴ Maurer Maurer, *Air Force Combat Units of World War II*, 75

“Pilots of the 17th and 20th Pursuit Squadrons in the jungle near Clarke Field, December 11, 1941.”¹⁵

Hughes then became the 20th Pursuits Squadron’s engineering officer.¹⁶ He was well-qualified for this position after working towards his degree in mechanical engineering at Washington State College for six years. The engineering officer was responsible for watching over the repairs of the damaged aircraft after the Japanese had attacked. Most of the time, they would take one salvageable plane and combine the parts from two to four other damaged planes to remake a usable plane for the future. They found more parts to use on the planes by simply hunting for parts that might have flown off the wings in nearby forests.¹⁷ Hughes and his crew were able to restore two of the P-40’s this way which helped greatly as there were only five in service at the time.¹⁸ He was very passionate about repairing these P-40s and was even seen at a party at the Fort Stotsenburg Officers Club, which they turned into a pilots’ lounge, as being mad because no one would continue to build these P-40 planes with him.¹⁹ These repaired P-40s proved to be essential as there was a very limited supply of aircraft at the Philippines even before most of them were destroyed in battle. Eventually they moved on to working on different types of aircraft, such as the Grumman J2F Duck. On January 5, 1942, the 20th Pursuit Squadron was working on one of the J2Fs in Mariveles harbor when five Japanese “Zero” fighter planes flew overhead and strafed them. When boats sink in sea water, the engines become corroded which make them unusable. Thankfully, Hughes saw that the J2F they were working on was close

¹⁵ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 161.

¹⁶ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 161.

¹⁷ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 162.

¹⁸ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 162.

¹⁹ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 168.

enough to shore that the engine was above the water level. Hughes then led his squadron to pull the Duck to higher ground and plug the machine gun holes with pieces of inner tube.²⁰

Eventually, America lost the Philippines to the Japanese and Hughes was taken as a prisoner of war by the Japanese around the fall of Bataan in 1942. He spent most of his time as a prisoner in POW Camp #1 in Cabanatuan.²¹ Hughes was aboard the *Arisan Maru*, a cargo ship that had the task to move 1,782 prisoners of war and around 100 civilians to the mainland of Japan to work as forced labor.²² This was later in the war when the Japanese were moving many of their prisoners away from the clutches of the Americans. When the ship was 200 miles away from Luzon, U.S. submarines surrounded the ship and started to attack, not knowing there were Americans aboard. On October 24, 1944, the *USS Shark* fired three torpedoes at the *Arisan Maru*, splitting it in half and taking it down.²³ Hughes died as a result of the sinking ship. He could have died due to the direct hit of the torpedoes or have been shot trying to escape the ship's sinking by Japanese soldiers.²⁴ Only eight prisoners of war survived the sinking, making it the largest loss of American lives in a single disaster at sea.²⁵

²⁰ William H. Bartsch, *Doomed at the Start*, 338.

²¹ Adjutant General's Office, "World War II Prisoners of War Data File, 12/7/1941 - 11/19/1946," National Archives.

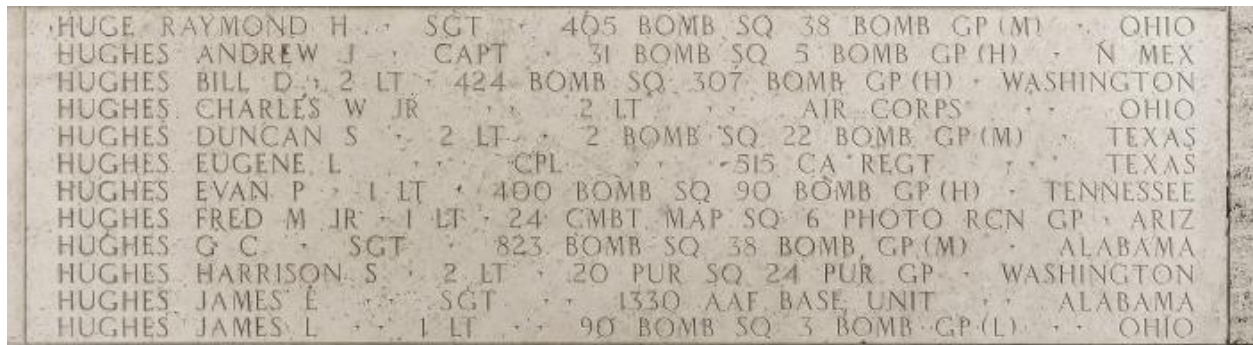
²² Adjutant General's Office, "World War II Prisoners of War Data File."

²³ Lee A. Gladwin, "American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell," *Prologue Magazine* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2003).

²⁴ Adjutant General's Office, "World War II Prisoners of War Data File, 12/7/1941 - 11/19/1946," National Archives.

²⁵ Lee A. Gladwin, "American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell," *Prologue Magazine* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2003).

Hughes' body was never recovered, but two memorials were put up in memory of him. First, the Manila American Cemetery made a section of their memorial called The Walls of the Missing where Harrison Hughes name is present.²⁶



Hughes' name on the Walls of the Missing in Manila.²⁷

There is also a cenotaph dedicated to Hughes in his hometown of Kennewick in Riverview Heights Cemetery to honor his memory.²⁸ The memory of Hughes was honored at Washington State College as well. The school had an annual homecoming football game pamphlet, called "The Cougar Huddle," in which a page was dedicated to those who lost their lives during World War II.²⁹ The Powwow WSC alumni journal also dedicated a page in one of their editions that made a tribute to those who had fallen in WWII in which Hughes name was mentioned.³⁰ The Veterans Memorial on Washington State's campus holds the name of the veterans of all wars that attended the school. Hughes' name remains on one of the World War II plaques to this day, an endless reminder of his sacrifice to protect his country.

²⁶ "Harrison H. Hughes," *American Battle Monuments Commission*, <https://www.abmc.gov/node/518450#.Wu3jSIgvw2w>.

²⁷ "Harrison H. Hughes," *American Battle Monuments Commission*, <https://www.abmc.gov/node/518450#.Wu3jSIgvw2w>.

²⁸ "Lieut Harrison Sterling Hughes," *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/9273883/harrison-sterling-hughes>

²⁹ "Football, 1945: Washington vs. WSC," *The Cougar Huddle*, November 24, 1945, 6.

³⁰ "They Gave Their Lives," *Powwow Alumni Journal*, (1946), 16.



Me sitting with Harrison Hughes' plaque at the Veterans Memorial at what is now Washington State University.

Born out of the Depression and getting an education as well as serving an important role of fixing the damaged fighter planes towards the beginning of the war. He persevered internment for around two years only to reach his demise on a cargo ship torpedoed by the Americans. Hughes life was a tragic yet memorable adventure that explains the relationship of World War II through the eyes of a simple yet accomplished Second Lieutenant.